Ladies Home Journal October 1970

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Was Sirhan "Programmed" to Kill Robert Kennedy?

R.F.K.'s friends struggle to subdue Sirhan. Later, the killer was unbelievably calm.

Was Sirhan a computerized assassin? In this preview of a book Sirhan tried to stop, the reporter who knew him best offers a chilling theory.

By Robert Blair Kaiser

In court, on trial for his life, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan said

conversations with Sirhan while he was in jail, I watched him shape and rehearse his Arab hero story. I was more inclined to judge that he was the tool of someone else, that he was kind of an automatic assassin, programmed like a computer, perhaps, to kill Kennedy—but almost certainly switched on by others.

It is my judgment, as the only outsider who has had access both to

her machine and wouldn't respond when she spoke to him. And moments after the shooting, there was only one person in the chaos of the pantry who was "peaceful": the assassin. Then, when policemen came and took the killer away, they shone a flashlight into his eyes. They found his pupils dilated—evidence that he was under some alien influence: drugs, alcohol, who knew what? And Sirhan was unbelievably detached when the police led him through an all-night interrogation, a most unusual attitude for a young man who had just gunned down a man whom he later said was "a god to me."

How did Sirhan come to be in such an unusual mental state on the night he killed R.F.K.?

As late as May 7, 1970, several days after a Los Angeles jury condemned him to die in the gas chamber at San Quentin, Sirhan compared himself to the original "assassins"—the *hashsashin,* members of a secret Mohammedan cult who drugged themselves before they committed their appointed murders. "It must have been something like that with me," he said.

I believe him. I had sat in on most of the hypnotic sessions Sirhan had

big sister

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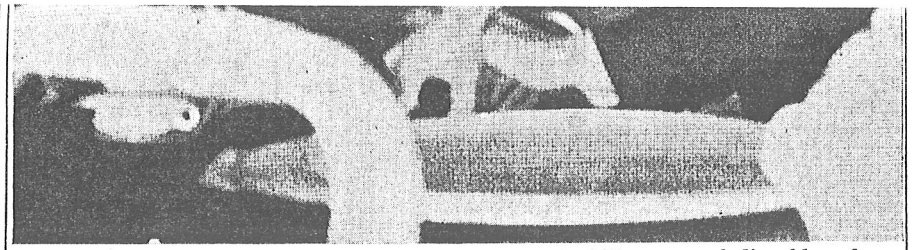

R.F.K.'s friends struggle to subdue Sirhan. Later, the killer was unbelievably calm.

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In court, on trial for his life, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan said he first made up his mind to kill Robert F. Kennedy when he saw a film biography of Senator Kennedy that was shown for the first time in Los Angeles on May 20, 1968. No one then asked Sirhan how it happened that he scribbled "R.F.K. must die" in his diary two days before that—on May 18. Sirhan's lawyers and the prosecuting attorneys apparently decided to accept the assassin's story that he was an "Arab hero" who had acted alone to kill Robert Kennedy because Kennedy favored selling U.S. jet fighters to Israel.

For two years now we have accepted the official verdict that there was no conspiracy to assassinate Bob Kennedy. I disagree. I did not believe Sirhan's story then—and I still don't.

When I think of Sirhan Sirhan, I think of a blank slate upon which ideas could be imposed with ease—or, better, a piece of videotape on which certain images could be electronically imprinted and sounds electronically etched. He was erasable and replayable. Through long conversations with Sirhan while he was in jail, I watched him shape and rehearse his Arab hero story. I was more inclined to judge that he was the tool of someone else, that he was kind of an automatic assassin, programmed like a computer, perhaps, to kill Kennedy—but almost certainly switched on by others.

It is my judgment, as the only outsider who has had access both to Sirhan and to the official records, that neither the FBI nor the Los Angeles police nor the prosecuting attorneys nor the defense attorneys probed deeply enough into the conspiracy question. I don't know why the FBI didn't. I think I do know why the others didn't. Questions about a conspiracy would only complicate their lives. The police couldn't admit the possibility of co-conspirators without producing some co-conspirators. Otherwise they'd look inept and their mayor, Sam Yorty, who was running for reelection, wouldn't look very good, either. The District Attorney's office was under public pressure to give Sirhan swift justice. The defense attorneys may have relied too heavily on the police, and I believe they were simply baffled by Sirhan.

In my estimation, there is considerable evidence to indicate that Sirhan appeared to be in a trance the night of June 4–5, 1968, when he shot Kennedy in the crowded pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

Shortly before the crime, a teletype operator at the Ambassador noted that Sirhan stared fixedly at for a young man who had just gunned down a man whom he later said was "a god to me."

How did Sirhan come to be in such an unusual mental state on the night he killed R.F.K.?

As late as May 7, 1970, several days after a Los Angeles jury condemned him to die in the gas chamber at San Quentin, Sirhan compared himself to the original "assassins"—the *hashsashin,* members of a secret Mohammedan cult who drugged themselves before they committed their appointed murders. "It must have been something like that with me," he said.

I believe him. I had sat in on most of the hypnotic sessions Sirhan had undergone with a psychiatrist, Dr. Bernard L. Diamond, dean of the School of Criminology at the University of California at Berkeley. Those sessions produced far less information than Dr. Diamond had hoped they would, but they convinced me that, while Sirhan didn't tell the whole truth under hypnosis, he was not faking when he said he couldn't remember the details of the assassination.

But why couldn't he?

Dr. Diamond believed that Sirhan had unconsciously "programmed himself exactly as a computer is programmed by its magnetic tape . . . for the coming assassination." That night he had then gone into a spontaneous trance under the influence of some bright lights, some mirrors and a little liquor, and finally proceeded to the crime itself.

But if that were true, Sirhan should have had some recollection, if not of the killing, at least of the programming process. He didn't remember that, either.

Was it possible that someone else had programmed Sirhan, possibly without his full knowledge? Sirhan didn't like *(continued on page 158)*

From the book "RFK Must Die," by Robert Kaiser, to be published this month by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. Copyright © 1970 by Robert Kaiser.

MRS. SUCCESS *continued*

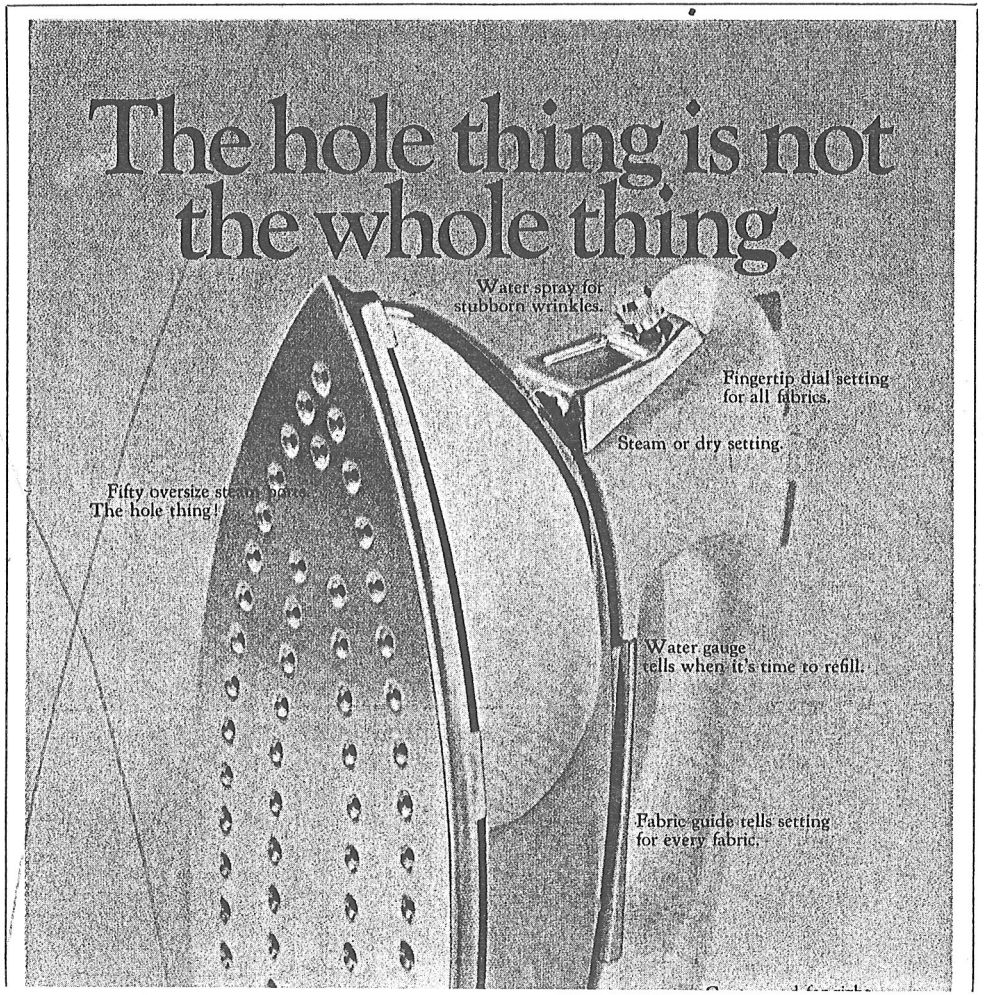
and by luck, Mrs. Success tries to raise her children, often in a home where there is no man present at the dinner table, the breakfast table, or the parent-teacher conference table. Other women, too, are raising children in homes where there is no regular male presence. Widows, divorcees, wives of traveling salesmen, all live a man-less existence that becomes most frustrating as children reach adolescence.

The main differences between the typical woman who strives alone and Mrs. Success are that Mrs. Success knows she has a husband who should be functioning as a father, and Mrs. Success can afford to buy the services and people that will share the child-raising responsibility with her. Her children begin with private nurses and end with their own cars. But in between . . . what happens?

Dr. Clifford Brown, a pediatrician, says: "The most frequent problem we get with children of successful parents is difficulty with school work. A child goes to school, does not discuss his school work at home, and all of a sudden the parents see a report card with failing grades. The first thing the parents do is decide to check the child's homework every night. Immediately after dinner they start, 'Did you do your homework yet? Show me what you did. What happened today?' Pretty soon the child feels trapped. His parents are pushing him to succeed. The school is pushing him to succeed.

"Whose fault is it? The schools that are rushing fair students through school at a scholar's pace. The only estheir children. Mothers compete with their daughters by dressing young and figuratively seducing the friends of their children without knowing what damage they are doing.

The successful father sets up competition with his son, but this is not always harmful, according to Dr. Brown. "If the boy can excel," he says, "then this competition is a help. But let's face it. It is much easier to compete with a father who is a failure.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WAS SIRHAN PROGRAMMED?

continued from page 66

that suggestion. Nor did I. It was a far-fetched theory, fetched in fact from Richard Condon's novel, *The Manchurian Candidate*. There, Raymond Shaw, the anti-hero who had been brainwashed in North Korea, was triggered by the phrase, "Why don't you pass the time by playing a little solitaire?" to riffle through a deck of playmurder by proxy, through hypnosis. In 1951, in Copenhagen, Bjorn Nielsen had programmed Palle Hardrup to go into a trance at the sight of the letter "X," rob a bank and kill anyone who got in his way—almost completely unaware that he had been used. Unlike the fictional Raymond Shaw, however, Hardrup had some notion of what had happened. In jail, he recalled enough about his former association with Nielsen to suspect that he had been used. He confided his suspicions to a psychiatrist, who spent almost a year cracking the mechanism by which Nielsen had locked Hardrup's recollections.

On February 8, 1969, during the Sirhan trial, Dr. Diamond programmed Sirhan, under hypnosis, to climb the bars of his cell, Sirhan had no idea what he was doing up on the top of the bars. When he finally discovered that climbing was not his own idea, but Dr. Diamond's, he wondered—and the thought frightened him—whether he had been programmed by someone else to kill Kennedy.

To Dr. Diamond, this was "a crackpot theory." It was, at least, unless someone could find a Kennedy-hater with hypnotic skills who used them on Sirhan.

I couldn't find such a person. I sought out some of the people who had played occult games with Sirhan. One of them admitted that he had written a menacing letter to Chief Justice Earl Warren that brought investigators from the FBI. And this man told a somewhat different version of his recent association with Sirhan than Sirhan told me. Still, this didn't mean he was involved in a plot. However, Sirhan told me that he had learned the art of autosuggestion from others, yet he

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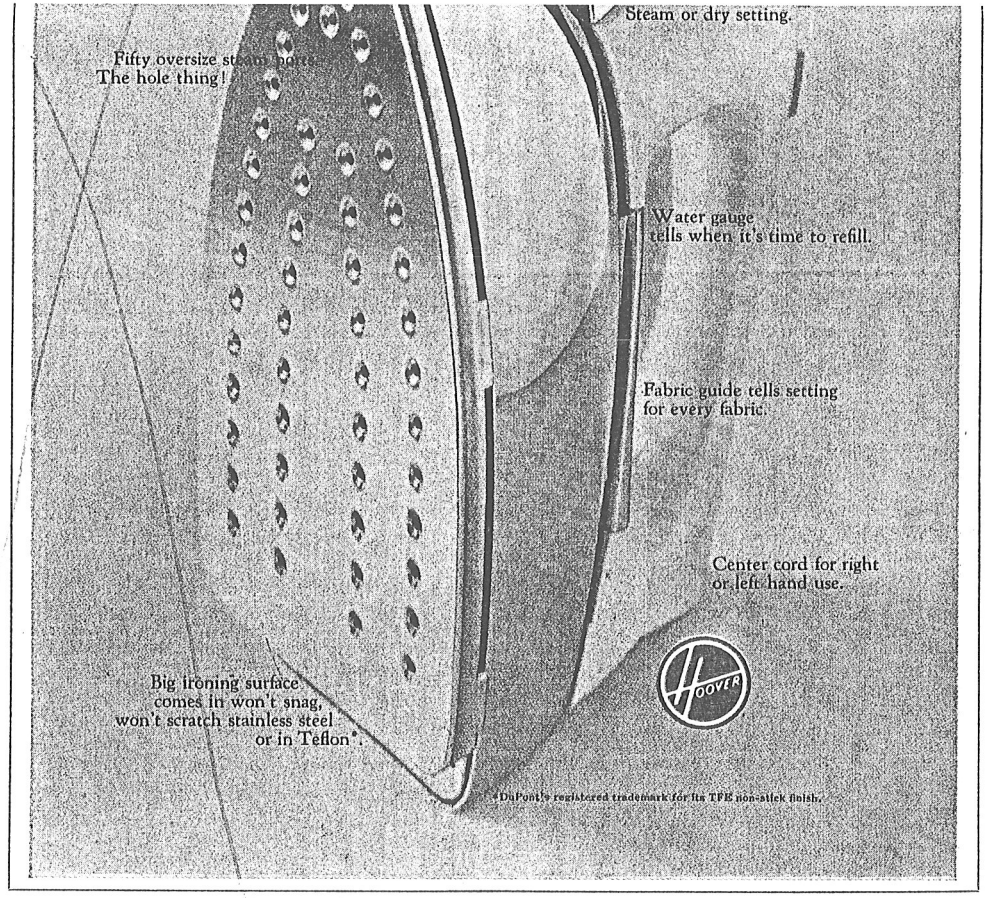
"Whose fault is it? The schools that are rushing fair students through school at a scholar's pace. The only escape for the trapped child is to run away.

"There is another thing I find very wrong with successful parents and their attitude toward school work," continues Dr. Brown, "and that is their belief that what an underachiever needs is more help at home."

This brings up one of the pitfalls of parenthood: the tendency of strong aggressive parents to take over responsibilities for their children. It begins in babyhood, according to Dr. Brown. "Let's take the example of the bedwetter," says the doctor. "The child bedwets, so every night at midnight the parents awaken the child and take him to the bathroom. One night the parents go to a party, and they arrive home at 12:30 to find that the child has wet the bed. So they wake the child and scold him. He turns to his parents and says, 'It's your fault. Why didn't you wake me up?' So who's right? Whose responsibility is it?"

Dr. Brown believes that the major disadvantage of successful parents is that they unknowingly compete with



Look at a lot of the millionaires today. Their fathers were nothing."

For all his concern about the children of successful parents and the disadvantages of the life they lead, Dr. Brown still thinks they are better off than other children. He smiles knowingly. "A lot of people think that the children of successful men have more problems. They don't. It is just that the parents in these marriages are aware of the emotional needs of their children and respond to them. This is the child we see more often."

To Be Continued Next Month

ing cards until he came to the queen of hearts; once finding that card, he would await further instructions, then kill without knowing why he had killed or even that he had killed.

Could this have been the case with Sirhan? After all Sirhan *had* experimented with occult mind-bending exercises. I thought the line worth pursuing. And so, marvel of marvels, did Sirhan. He finally asked me, on December 31, 1968, to investigate further. Could anyone have exerted such an influence over his mind?

I did some research and discovered an interesting real-life example of

kill Kennedy.

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For this reason and because of several other curious admissions and evasions, I still had a feeling that somewhere in Sirhan's recent past there was a shadowy someone. So did Roger LaJeunesse, the FBI agent in charge of the Sirhan investigation, who confided to me: "The case is still open. I'm not rejecting the *Manchurian Candidate* aspect of it." LaJeunesse had attended the trial, he heard Dr. Diamond's testimony, and he seemed convinced that Sirhan was in a trance on the night of June 4. And he knew, better than I, that Robert Kennedy had enemies who could have chosen Sirhan, with his antiauthority feelings and his inert paranoia, as a possible tool. Sirhan was a man with nothing to lose, with enough conscious and unconscious hatred within him to

Whenever someone says about a place "You can't miss it"—I can miss it. —Poor Woman's Almanac

draw the attention of anyone looking for a likely gunman.

Who would have wanted to use Sirhan in this way? I didn't know. But the police and the FBI (and I) unearthed evidence that Sirhan associated with extremists of both the Right and the Left and that he had some connections with the so-called underworld. I couldn't investigate these ties. But the police and the FBI had the legal mandate and the resources to do so. I could only hope that they would, that, secretly, they were applying wit and imagination even while public-relations-minded spokesmen continued to force the facts or to reveal only those that enhanced their own image—as Robert Houghton, assistant chief of the Los Angeles police, did in his book on the assassination (*Special Unit Senator,* Random House, 1970).

We looked for a conspiracy, Houghton said, and we didn't find one. I think he looked the other way when his own detectives browbeat Thomas Vincent DiPierro until DiPierro retracted his story of seeing "the girl in the polka dot dress" with Sirhan the night of the assassination.

A pretty girl

Houghton's suspicions were not aroused by the story of the Pomona bartender who said he saw Sirhan stalking Kennedy on May 20 in the company of a pretty girl.

Houghton overlooked the insurance executive who saw Sirhan at target practice in May at Rancho California, again with a pretty girl. He brushed aside the puzzle of Edward Van Antwerp, who mysteriously disappeared from Corona, Calif., 12 hours before Senator Kennedy was shot and reappeared two

Kennedy's name appeared there, it was always accompanied by the phrase, "Please pay to the order of Sirhan." That should have aroused the suspicions of anyone over eight, much more of a police officer who was always ready to expect the worst. But Houghton made the supreme effort. He ignored that, too, partly because he assumed that Sirhan would have to have had the money in hand before he struck and Houghton couldn't find

forget any promises of money: "I have never heard please pay to the order of of of of of of of of of this or that 80000."

Sirhan never could explain the references to money in his notebook. Where did the instructions come from? From Sirhan or from somebody else?

It was possible that these orders came from somebody else, and that Sirhan then drummed them into his own mind. But no one could say with

"Sirhan," said Dr. Diamond, "did anybody pay you to shoot Kennedy?" Five-second pause. No answer.

"Did anybody pay you to shoot Kennedy, Sirhan?" A sigh.

"Yes or no?" Two-second pause. "I can't hear you."

"No."

"No? No one paid you to shoot Kennedy. Did anybody know ahead of time that you were going to do it, Sirhan?"

Two-second pause. "No."

"No?" Dr. Diamond asked. "Did anybody from the Arabs tell you to shoot Kennedy? Any of your Arab friends?"

Immediately: "No."

"Did the Arab government have anything to do with it, Sirhan?"

Immediately: "No."

"Did you think this up all by yourself?"

Sirhan paused six seconds. "Yes," he said.

It would, furthermore, take even a man with Dr. Diamond's skills more time to explore with Sirhan the significance of his assertion that he could, for instance, "blow the top off this case" if he chose to say what he knew. Even Dr. Diamond would need more time to see what had prompted Sirhan's successive stories that Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon or James Hoffa had put him up to killing Kennedy, more time to find out why Sirhan thought that "the FBI did a lousy job of investigation" and "didn't know everything."

Secretive fellow

It is impossible now for me to recheck the facts with Sirhan. He has refused to see me any more. He became angry about the kind of book he suspected I was writing about him, and sued to prevent its publication. My

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Houghton overlooked the insurance executive who saw Sirhan at target practice in May at Rancho California, again with a pretty girl. He brushed aside the puzzle of Edward Van Antwerp, who mysteriously disappeared from Corona, Calif., 12 hours before Senator Kennedy was shot and reappeared two weeks later in Eureka, Calif. Van Antwerp had told the FBI he never knew Sirhan when, as a matter of fact, he had roomed with Sirhan for five months. Houghton apparently did not find it strange that the FBI and his own investigators took 10 months to find the man who brought Sirhan to Corona in the first place, Frank Donnarauma, alias Henry Donald Ramistella of New Jersey.

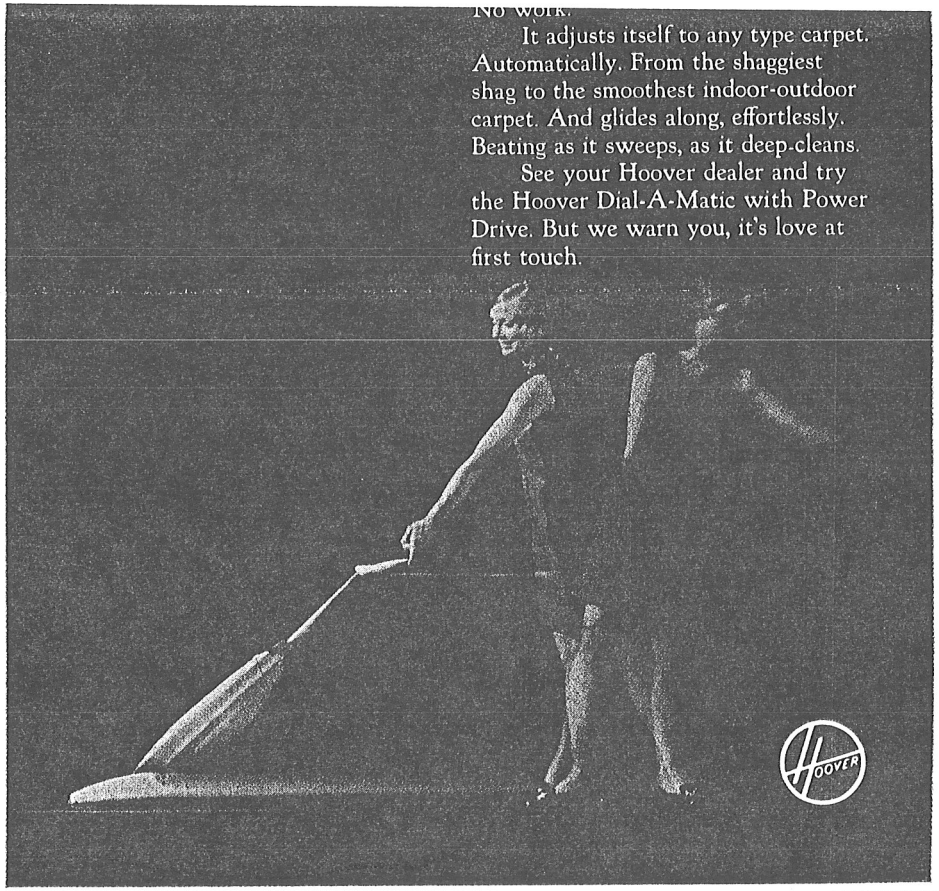
Houghton overlooked the direct, naïve approaches that investigators made to Jimmy Hoffa, and the likes of Hoffa, who were not above suspicion: "Tell us about your contract to have Senator Kennedy killed, Jimmy. No? No contract? Oh, well, sorry to have bothered you, Jimmy." And Houghton seemingly approved the facile thesis that anyone who had facts running counter to the lone-assassin theory was "psycho."

It wasn't easy for Houghton to ignore the evidence in Sirhan's notebook that Sirhan associated the killing of Robert Kennedy with some kind of payoff to himself. Whenever any extra money to support his belief.

It is entirely possible that Sirhan was gunning for Kennedy on a simple promise of money, sweetened by a small down payment. He could have bet that money at the racetrack, or stashed it away, or, indeed, given it to his family.

Grant Cooper, Sirhan's defense attorney, once asked him about the money angle and Sirhan answered with a question of his own: "If I got the money, where is it?"

Here, Sirhan seemed genuinely evasive. But it was clear that in his notebook he was repeating instructions to certainty. It would take a psychoanalyst as skilled as Dr. Diamond perhaps another year of interviews with Sirhan to test this theory thoroughly —to put Sirhan through more hypnotic sessions in an effort to see if, indeed, his memory had been blocked by some kind of psychological locking mechanism. There was some indication that it was. On certain occasions when Dr. Diamond put Sirhan under hypnosis and asked him about the involvement of others, Sirhan would go into a deep sleep. Once, on January 11, 1969, Sirhan answered some questions quickly and easily. On others he blocked.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Secretive fellow

It is impossible now for me to recheck the facts with Sirhan. He has refused to see me any more. He became angry about the kind of book he suspected I was writing about him, and sued to prevent its publication. My narrative shows a new Sirhan: a secretive fellow whose pseudo-explanations, evasions, fabrications and lies would give many readers reason to conclude that he might be nothing more than a hired gun. Sirhan was afraid that my book would reopen the case. That apprehension made him very unhappy. He rather liked his identity as an Arab hero. And I was taking it away from him. **END**

THIS IS THE WAY
By Christie Lund Coles

This is a way of life
this letting go,
this willing to be free
of tension and of doubt,
of looking up and out,
of believing
in the dark,
that there is a light
somewhere.
And a Lark.